

JAPAN / SCIENCE & HEALTH

Number of COVID-19 and flu cases remain high in Japan



According to the latest data, new COVID-19 cases reported in the week to Feb. 11 stood at 13.75 per institution. | GETTY IMAGES

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Both COVID-19 and influenza cases have remained high in Japan through this month, prompting experts to urge people to continue taking basic countermeasures such as the use of face masks, hand-washing and ventilation.

COVID-19 was downgraded to a lower-risk category that also

includes the flu under the infectious disease control law last May, and the health ministry currently estimates the infection situation for both COVID-19 and flu based on new cases reported regularly from about 5,000 medical institutions nationwide.

According to the latest data, new COVID-19 cases reported in the week to Feb. 11 stood at 13.75 per institution. By prefecture, Ishikawa had the largest number, at 21.91, followed by Aichi Prefecture, at 20.06.

Although new cases across Japan dropped on average for the first time in about three months, the country is experiencing a "10th wave" of infections, experts have warned.

The new and highly contagious JN.1 variant, which is believed to evade the immune system more easily than past strains, has increasingly been found in infected people.

According to reports from some 500 regularly monitored medical institutions across the country in the same seven-day period, 3,257 people were newly hospitalized due to COVID-19, almost on par with levels during the ninth wave last year. People aged 70 or over, who are at higher risk of developing serious symptoms, accounted for more than 70% of the total.

Per-institution new flu cases came to 23.93 in the week to Feb. 11, up for the fifth straight week, although the number was down about 30% from a peak level in early December.

Fukuoka Prefecture had the largest number, at 56.48, followed by neighboring Saga Prefecture, at 38.15. The per-institution figure topped the alert level of 10 in 44 of the country's 47 prefectures.

Atsuo Hamada, professor for travel medicine at Tokyo Medical

University, said that new COVID-19 cases are close to peaking out, but warned that infections may spread again later.

The flu outbreak may continue until it gets warmer in March, he added, calling on people to continue taking measures to prevent infection, such as wearing face masks when going to crowded places, washing hands and keeping rooms well ventilated.

He also stressed the importance of measures to prevent infections from spreading, including staying home when feeling unwell.

KEYWORDS

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